

THE TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday

STANDING FAST WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

A reflection from a homily by Fr. Karl Rahner

“Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain and began to go through Galilee. He didn't want anyone to know about this because he was teaching his disciples that the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and put to death and that three days later he will rise” (Mk.9:30ff). The Twelve Apostles, the foundation stones of the Church, Peter and the other eleven, those Jesus had chosen and called, didn't understand him. Yet they were to be the beginning of the new People of God!

They can't grasp the fact Jesus must suffer. They aren't even willing to try to make sense of what he has said, even the part about rising after three days. Yet they remain with Jesus! They do that even when they see they don't understand him. They remain steadfast, faithful and are patient. Jesus, for them, is a kind of advance payment of confidence. They give him time to grow in their hearts! More, God bears with them. Their hearts are darkened; they don't understand. They are stuck and scarcely even want to leave their ignorance behind.

The thing is that they are undergirded by God's mercy and faithfulness and providence and love. Uncomprehended mystery stands between them and the Lord but doesn't separate them. Neither abandons the other and both cling to each other. Why is this? It is because God loves and is faithful and because the humans involved realize that even if they don't understand what seems a mystery, God and God's grace are found only where Jesus, that mystery, is.

There is a lesson for us in all this. Compare all you grasp and understand—all that is clear and straightforward—with the obscure and baffling things, the hidden and not comprehended ones, all that is mysterious and unspeakable. When we do this, we understand that what we do see is like a tiny candle shining in endless darkness.

How could anything else be possible, granted that we are on a pilgrimage. We are making our way through things that seem only parables rather than realities. We are on the way toward the everlasting light. And we are told it is an unapproachable light! It is God. What we seek only God can give. Wouldn't it be foolish to expect that everything will be intelligible? Wouldn't it be foolish to accept only so much as we can understand?

God is for us incomprehensible, so God must lay hold of us. Only when God does, can we let ourselves be made open to God. God is infinite and we must be open to that. But only if we are open wholly is there any hope for us. More than hope, however, we have the promise that we will find everything. Remembering this we cling to God, even in darkness. We must be faithful and patient and loving toward God, just as our God is toward us.

Monday

SACRED READING

from **Carried by the Current** by Fr Ambrose Tinsley OSB

As we celebrate the feast of St Matthew my thoughts turn to the words which so impressed the young Augustine that he went to where his bible was, and having opened it at random, read the words which then immediately caught his eye: "Take and read, take and read". That moment was to be for him a very special one and later on, when looking back on his own life, he saw it as a most important milestone in his quest. However, let us note that when he was describing the event, he was aware that there were other people who in ways were quite similar and who had come in that way to recognize what they should do. He mentioned in particular the famous desert monk, Anthony of Egypt, who on entering a nearby church, had been so struck by the story of the Rich Young Man, immediately, obeyed the call to follow, and by doing so in his own particular way, became for many after him a model to be followed. So, we have examples from the lives of these two important people to encourage us in turn to "Take and Read or simply, hear, the scriptures and to let the given word both touch and influence the way we live each day.

What I am saying is not meant to imply that every time we take up Matthew's Gospel or one of the other biblical books, we will find exciting verses which will suddenly transform our lives. That would be too much to expect. But on the other hand, it certainly is true that each and every verse of Scripture did contain a vital meaning for those people who first heard it, and that was of course the very reason why it was remembered and conserved.

The inspiring Word that comes from God is an enabling one. To put that in a negative, yet very telling, way let me here introduce a woman living close to our Benedictine monastery of Ewe, Nigeria, who used to start her day by praying with some others in the church. Then, when on one occasion she was working in the nearby open market, she spotted the local catechist passing by. She beckoned her and said "A little while ago I was about to do what I knew I should not do, but I thought of what you read and said this morning and I didn't do it". There the Word of God which had been heard and obviously pondered bore its own fruit in a good and conscientious person's life. So, it can be for us too.

Tuesday

DON'T LOSE YOUR HOPE, NO MATTER WHAT!

A reflection by Hilda Graef

All of us have been called to a prophetic office. We were told this at the very beginning of our life of faith—when we were baptized. The framework for every prophetic vocation is the antinomy between God's holiness and human unworthiness. Think of the call of the prophet Isaiah. He had a vision of the Lord seeking someone to carry a message of destruction and of salvation. What had been was to perish and it would be replaced by something that would bring new closeness to God. Angels cry out "Holy! Holy! Holy!" and knowing this Isaiah grasped his unworthiness and need to be cleansed. But he realized that he was not alone in unworthiness. His people and community stood before God as unworthy and needing God to cleanse them. But what does that involve?

At the very beginning of Scripture God says it is not good for us to be alone; we need a community but one that points us toward God. Prophets have to live the message they proclaim and let go of many things to accept a new way of life. God sent an angel to symbolically purify Isaiah for this and in accepting it he was made worthy and given the gifts needed to prophesy—as we are.

The difficult part of this is that we have to call on our friends and neighbors to turn from their own projects and accept whatever God calls them to do. No one likes to let go of the projects they have constructed; these things are supposed to bring them a good life! But we have to remind them that only God can give us a life that is worth living, one that genuinely brings good—to us and to many others. Are we willing to pay the price of letting God do this?

The scary fact is that if we don't let go of our own projects and plans God will take them away to make room for the one's he wants to give us. Think of what Isaiah had to prophesy; he had to tell people that their entire community and nation were going to be destroyed. We like to believe that nothing like that will happen in our case. But what about the Christian believers called to declare that the Nazi project was going to lead everyone involved to lose everything? What of those sent to prison camps in Soviet Russia? What is there about our own community or our country that leads people away from God's Kingdom and toward a vision of the future that ignores God? Perhaps we have to say what won't be welcomed or even believed.

The prophets of Israel in ancient times proclaimed a new hope. But to accept that hope, to allow it to be realized, they would have to watch what they were working so hard at come to nothing. We often think of them as prophets of destruction. But that is not what they were. They were prophets sent to clear away everything that was getting in the way of renewal. God's compassion and mercy and love are the driving and forming forces renewing communities. We are called to just such tasks. But we can only do what God asks if we trust God no matter what happens to us and our community. Don't try to call others to what you aren't willing to do

Wednesday

LONGING TO LOVE GOD

A letter of St. Pius of Pietrelcina

Your letter reached me on Easter morning and brought to my poor soul relief sufficient to make it possible to bear the cross to which the Lord in his mercy has been pleased to subject me. For this may the goodness of the Heavenly Father ever be blest. To you my heartfelt thanks and blessings. I solemnly promise before the Lord to continue to raise my voice to heaven for you and with ever greater fervor than before.

So that God may more readily hear my poor prayers I will make every effort, with the assistance of Divine grace, to be a good religious priest. May I be able to say one day with the Apostle: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ". I promise myself this much, with Jesus' assistance. Unfortunately, I don't deserve his assistance but I am led to hope for it by his inexhaustible charity toward all of us.

I told you, Father, that your letter, thank Heaven, brought me a little relief. But I lay before you also the very great terror I experienced when I learned that you consider suspect those threats which I mentioned in my last letter. As you know, Father, I would not want to be a victim of the devil in anything whatever. Although I am more certain of the reality of those locutions than I am of my own existence I am still struggling against myself and protest that I want to believe nothing of all this for the sole reason that you, as my director, have cast doubt upon it. Am I right or wrong?

You must know, moreover, Father, that Jesus has not taken offence in any way at my failure to attach importance to what he said and to give my accidental assent to it. I say "accidental" to distinguish it from that deep and substantial conviction which endures after all the efforts not to believe it. I am not free to divest myself of this conviction. What am I to do, Father? Am I unwittingly a victim of the enemy? Enlighten me on this point, which I would prefer to remain obscure. How difficult, dear Father, is the way of Christian perfection for a soul as ill-disposed as mine. My wickedness makes me fearful at every step I take: May the good God sustain me and prevent me from betraying Him.

You know, Father, that I attach no importance to all this extraordinary state of mine. For this reason, I never stop asking Jesus to lead me by the ordinary path followed by everyone else, for I am aware that the way by which divine mercy is leading me is not suitable for my soul, accustomed as it is to very material food. What I say to the Lord is that I am seeking the amendment of my life, my spiritual resurrection, true and substantial love, the sincere conversion of my whole life to Him. Speak to me at length, dear Father, about all this, and if you find me at fault do not keep silence. I want to love Jesus as I should. I desire this love. I know I love him, but—dear God—how inferior my love is compared with my desire to love. Ought it not be the opposite, that my love should surpass my desire for it!

Thursday

HOLINESS

A Talk by Dom Helder Camara

Very often people-particularly poor people, humble people- imagine that you are better, more virtuous, than you really are, and want to canonize you, even when you are still alive. There is a story about St. Francis of Assisi that I am very fond of, and that I find helpful. One day Francis and Brother Leo were out walking together. Suddenly Brother Leo called out: "Brother Francis! ". "Yes, I am Brother Francis." "Be careful, Brother Francis! People are saying remarkable things about you.! Be careful!" And Francis of Assisi replied: "My friend, pray to the Lord that I may succeed in becoming what people think I am." It is a beautiful reply.

There is a danger of losing your head when people begin to think of you as an extraordinary person, as a saint. But there are fortunately ways of guarding against it. For example, when I am about to go out and face a huge audience that is applauding me and cheering me, I turn to Christ and say to him simply: "Lord, this is your triumphal entry into Jerusalem! I am just the little donkey you are riding on!". And it is true.

Holiness....Holy is the Lord. He is the only saint. There is only one Lord. But shared holiness is not a privilege reserved for exceptional individuals. It is a duty for all of us. Through baptism we receive grace, the grace which brings us holiness. It is very naïve to think that being holy means seeing visions, performing miracles, living a life that is hard and very extraordinary!

There is no single definition of holiness but there is one I am particularly fond of: being holy means getting up immediately every time you fall, with humility and joy. It does not mean never falling into sin. It means being able to say: "Yes, Lord, I have fallen a thousand times. But thanks to you I got up again a thousand times." That, is it. I like thinking about that.

When you are approaching death, it is very tempting to count your weaknesses and your failings and your sins, and perhaps to lose courage. I think it is better not to count them at all. Better still not to talk about them. It is good to say"

Yes! My weaknesses and my failings and my sins are many, and very serious! But there is something greater than all my weakness and failings and sins: the mercy of God." There are so many wonderful things I could tell you about the mercy of God.

Friday

WHAT DO WE NEED MORE THAN GOOD EXAMPLE?

A reflection based on a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

Devotion to the memory of our dead—of those who have gone before us with the sign of faith—is particularly important. It is above all a meditation on eternal truths. This helps us perceive what it is that passes away and what it is that is destined to last forever.

This is not a day to simply pray for our dead. Yes, we pray for our dead; we ask that they may be in the full joy of the vision of God face to face. But they are already in the loving arms of divine mercy, beside which our compassion and mercy are so little! Indeed, our prayers for them are as much prayers that we may trust in our God's love and mercy even as those who have gone before us already do.

What we are actually doing is renewing the bonds of mutual love, of reinforcing for one another fidelity to our loving God, and strengthening the gratitude to God which inspired us to live and struggle together to live the love that Jesus shows us. Love grows by actual loving. Others make this happen.

Remembering our dead is not simply a matter of honoring them. It renews the rich and deep love that has motivated us all our life long to keep struggling, to keep rising from our falls and asking pardon, to never stop trying to learn to give ourselves for another—and even for many others.

All those who have taught us love will further teach us by awakening the longing to love and to serve that was their constant unspoken message during our living together. Parents renew bonds with children and children with parents, spouses renew the deep love that bound them to one another. Those who taught us special lessons about loving and serving are present to us and we to them.

Those we remember today are people who helped us in special ways. They didn't give up on us, and we are determined to repay that gift in some small way. How can we repay it except by loving? We all remember the precious examples and lessons we have given one another. These memories cheer and encourage us. Our dead now bless God in a way impossible perhaps while on earth. They thereby remind us that our bonds are always strongest in God and through God.

Perhaps no prayer is more contemplative, more totally directed to God, than the prayer we pray with our beloved departed. We only have one another in God. Yet we don't love God simply to love one another more deeply. What we learn is that our love for one another grows richer and deeper as it finds its natural and everlasting home in our common union with our God. It is in God that all are drawn together. This too is a gift for which we need to thank Our Lord; it is one which God has given us through these others we now remember. Remembering in God is a new way of being one with each other. It is a new way of learning love. That is the point of this special day of remembrance.

Saturday

THE SHEPHERD'S FLUTE

From a Letter of Catherine De Hueck Doherty

Have you ever heard a shepherd's flute in Scotland, or in Jerusalem? It is so haunting, so enticing, so irresistible that you have to follow the sound and go to see where it comes from. The Good Shepherd's flute is constantly playing. If we close our ears to it, life will be miserable indeed. Our Madonna House is like a monastery, and it has an apostolate of music. We are listening to the Shepherd's flute, of which all music is but an echo.

The story of Madonna House is the story of prayer. Everything that happens to us involves prayer. Ours is the story of two words, "fiat" and "alleluia". To say fiat is to say yes to God, and this yes is often painful.

We cannot live these words without constant prayer. It is inconceivable to think we can live them by ourselves, but this has always been humankind's greatest temptation. Throughout the ages, we have tried to build our Tower of Babel that we might reach up to heaven. But we cannot do it on our own. Every day we need to listen to the words of Jesus "Cut off from me you can do nothing".

These words spoken two thousand years ago, have still not penetrated our hearts. We are reluctant to accept them. "No!" we say. We protest. "It is not true! I can do lots of things without you- just watch me. I can earn your approval, your grace, your salvation. You don't have to give me gifts all the time I don't want to recognize you as the creator of everything. I want to put in my own two cents worth."

We can of course contribute our own two cents worth if we realize that nothing is possible without God. Once we acknowledge this, we can give him a million dollars. We can allow the idea of total dependence to permeate our lives until, like sugar dissolved in boiling water, the two become indistinguishable.

Prayer is my total faith in God as my creator. I am his image, his icon, and without him I can do nothing. Prayer is my recognition of who I really am: a saved sinner, capable of breaking my friendship with God at any given moment and even likely to revel in its breaking. When I recognize this, prayer is not something optional in my life. Prayer becomes a basic necessity. Prayer is the only answer to the restlessness that we all feel from time to time. So, listen to the Shepherd's flute and follow him.